Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 16 Number 7 July 2019

Details for the July field trips are given below:

**FIELD TRIP - 1: Sunday, 14th July 2019: Umamaheswaram. Meeting point: Universal Bakery, near NMDC, Masab Tank, 5.00AM. Coordinator: Sudhir Moorti (Mobile: 9652283335)**

Located around 155km from Hyderabad and known as the gateway to Srisailam, Umamaheswaram nestles atop a hill and offers splendid views of the valley and surrounding forest. The site is home to a variety of birds, and is well-known for the endemic Yellow-throated Bulbul, Painted Spurfowl and many other species. This would be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast.

**FIELD TRIP - 2: Sunday, 28th July 2019: Narsapur Reserve Forest. Meeting point: Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 5.15AM; opposite Dindigul Air Force Station, 5.45AM. Coordinator: Gowthama Poludasu (Mobile: 9440910967)**

Always a dependable birding destination, the beauty and richness of bird diversity of the verdant Narsapur Forest would be much enhanced at the beginning of the monsoon season. Some of us would also remember the day when we saw eight Coppersmith Barbets on a single tree! There is also a lake nearby which usually has good populations of waterfowl. This trip will take up most part of the day. Carry adequate water, breakfast and protective gear.

For both the trips, we will be car-pooling, so please let the coordinator know if you need a ride, and also if you can accommodate any others in your vehicle. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. Our new T-Shirts and Caps will be available for sale; T-Shirts are Rs. 450/- each and Caps are Rs. 250/-. Also, as always, please avoid plastic carry bags and containers.

**INDOOR MEETING: Talk on "Bird Hits" by Wg Cdr Y Prakash Rao (Retd). Tuesday, 23rd July 2019, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Wg Cdr Y Prakash Rao (Retd) is a Civil Helicopter Pilot with over 6500 hours of flying in various aircraft of the Indian Air Force in India, Bhutan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. He is also an ace birder with keen birding and photography skills. A Life Member of Deccan Birders, he will speak about the contributing factors that lead to birds striking aircraft, what happens to the aircraft thereafter, and solutions and preventive measures. Please do not miss what promises to be a very interesting talk.

## Announcement

With great pleasure, we would like to inform you that we are starting a new section in the Pitta – **Children's Corner**. This section will feature contributions by our members, or the children of our members, who are below the age of 12 years.

Contributions could include trip reports, experiences, bird sketches/paintings, field notes, photographs taken by the children – in short, almost anything that is bird or birding-related. We hope and believe that this section would provide a platform, and serve as a tool, for triggering the creativity of the children in our midst.

Children have a unique take on most things, and that should make for interesting reading. While the Editors will, of course, have the final say on what goes into the section, we do hope that there will only be a problem of plenty!

# ***CHILDREN'S CORNER***

We kickstart the section with a contribution from Nidhii on the recent Himayatsagar trip, and a poem from Khushi on the wonders of birds and birding.

## ***MY FIRST BIRDING TRIP***

## **Himayatsagar Lake, June 16, 2019**

Nidhii (Age 9 years)

*It was a wonderful and an exciting trip. We woke up early and got ready. My mother too woke up early on Sunday to make us sandwiches. We went to the starting point and began our journey along with others. At Aziznagar, we halted for others to join us and my father had met other birders and had tea with them.*

*We then started for Himayatsagar lake and after taking a wrong road we finally reached it. Our first sighting was a pair of Yellow-wattled Lapwings on the ground – Srikanth Uncle was kind to lend us his spare binoculars. We saw many Cormorants. I saw a Kingfisher bird sitting on a rock. My father saw many Cotton Pygmy Geese. After some time, four horse riders came on the other side of the lake and most of the birds flew away. There was one particular bird which was flying against the wind in the same spot and it was making a lot of noise.*

*After that we shared sandwiches, said bye to everybody and came home tired but happy. We also saw many Weaver bird nests on the way back.*

*I am waiting to go for my next birding trip!*

* * *

## ***BIRDS – GOD'S WONDERFUL CREATIONS***

Khushi (Age 12 years)

*God's wonder flying in the skies*

*We wonder seeing how it flies*

*We got lost searching for it*

*Trying to identify when they sit*

*We, a small group of adventurous birders*

*Went out on their search*

*Many trees many plants*

*Many creatures like ants*

*Big big cameras in adventurer's hands*

*The birds were perching on the trees and wet lands*

*The rare nightjar flying above all*

*A lark came in between and showed us its fall*

*Yellow and brown was the bulbul's tail*

*Closer and closer we went and found a snail*

*Glancing at its beauty make you forget everything*

*We followed it and there it was sitting like a king*

*We went walking and walking and reached a moor*

*The red lapwing giving a call to protect its nest*

*Walked away not to disturb the rest*

*Reached the nearby lake*

*To only spot a group of herons, ducks, flamingo to name a few*

*Returned back and shared our views.*

*A good day well spent*

*On a call that nature has sent.*

* * *

# Trip to Himayatsagar Lake, June 16, 2019

Some photos taken by our members during the Himayatsagar trip:

**Eurasian Spoonbill**
(Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

**Streak-throated Swallow**
(Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

**Black-winged Stilt on almost-dry lake bed**
(Photo: Bharadwaj Korni)

**Pheasant-tailed Jacana**
(Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

**Greater Painted-snipe**
(Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

**Cotton Pygmy Goose**
(Photo: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

The list of birds seen on the trip is given below:

| Sl. No. | Species Name | Sl. No. | Species Name | Sl. No. | Species Name |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Cotton Pygmy Goose | 20 | Grey Heron | 39 | Streak-throated Swallow |
| 2 | Indian Peafowl | 21 | Purple Heron | 40 | Black Drongo |
| 3 | Painted Francolin (Call) | 22 | Indian Pond Heron | 41 | Asian Pied Starling |
| 4 | Grey Francolin | 23 | Eurasian Spoonbill | 42 | Common Myna |
| 5 | Little Grebe | 24 | Red-naped Ibis | 43 | Purple-rumped Sunbird |
| 6 | Lesser Whistling-duck | 25 | Black-headed Ibis | 44 | Large Egret |
| 7 | Rock Pigeon | 26 | Glossy Ibis | 45 | Cattle Egret |
| 8 | Spotted Dove | 27 | Black Kite | 46 | Little Egret |
| 9 | Southern Coucal (Call) | 28 | Common Kingfisher | 47 | Indian Robin |
| 10 | Grey-bellied Cuckoo (Call) | 29 | White-throated Kingfisher | 48 | Pied Bushchat |
| 11 | Eurasian Coot | 30 | Green Bee-eater | 49 | Common Sandpiper |
| 12 | White-breasted Waterhen | 31 | House Crow | 50 | Wood Sandpiper |
| 13 | Black-winged Stilt | 32 | Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark | 51 | Pheasant-tailed Jacana |
| 14 | Yellow-wattled Lapwing | 33 | Indian Bushlark | 52 | Red-vented Bulbul |
| 15 | Red-wattled Lapwing | 34 | Oriental Skylark | 53 | White-browed Bulbul |
| 16 | Kentish Plover | 35 | Paddyfield Pipit | 54 | Common Moorhen |
| 17 | Greater Painted-snipe | 36 | Scaly-breasted Munia | 55 | Spot-billed Duck |
| 18 | River Tern | 37 | Baya Weaver | 56 | Indian Silverbill |
| 19 | Little Cormorant | 38 | Asian Palm-swift | 57 | Little Ringed Plover |

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# SCIENTIFIC NAMES OF BIRDS – AN EXPLORATION INTO THE HOW AND WHY

Text and Photos: Col SS Cheema (Retd)

I have no formal training in ornithological studies but I was always intrigued by the scientific names of the birds I used to come across during birdwatching. So I have been on to this task of learning more about how the birds are named and what is the logic behind it all. I am sharing the findings from my studies over the past almost six months, and have tried to lay them down in as easy a language as possible.

Firstly, the moot question - should we address these names as 'scientific names'? Or 'Latin names'? 'Latin names' is what we call them fairly commonly, though that may not be true any longer. Many languages have contributed to names of the birds: Latin is/was very common, but many names of birds now originate from Greek, Old English, Russian, Malay, South American native languages etc. That being said, regardless of the origin, generic names are required to have a form of a Latin noun, with defined gender, and specific names are required to decline according to rules of Latin adjectives. This was how the system was at that time when Latin was the language of international communication. However, today, calling them 'scientific names' may be more correct, as some names are not Latin at all.

There are in all four parts of the full scientific name. The ***first part of the name describes the genus*** that distinguishes a group of isolated, distinctive species. This must be a form of a noun or a substantivised adjective treated as a noun. This has to begin with an Upper-case letter. The ***second part of the name begins with a lower-case letter and describes the species within the genus*** and may take many forms though it is commonly an adjective or a noun in the genitive case. The ***third and the fourth part reveal the name and the year in which that name was first validly published*** as a Binomen. We will tackle the first two parts of the names in this article.

Now that we know that the scientific names are to be addressed as 'Scientific Names', let us look at the criteria that were used while coining the names. These categories/criteria are as below:

1. **Morphonym**: (Gr. *morphē* form; *onuma* name) – Based on plumage, colours and physical characteristics of the birds, and is the largest category, accounting for over half of all specific names and nearly half of all generic names.

**White-bellied Blue Flycatcher**

An example is the India's endemic White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, whose scientific name is *Cyornis pallidipes*. Here:

- ***Cyornis***: derived from the Greek *kuanos*, meaning 'dark blue'; and *ornis*, which stands for 'bird';
- ***pallidus***: in Latin, stands for 'pale'; *pes* stands for 'foot'.

So, the name describes the plumage and physical characteristics as 'dark blue bird with pale feet'.

2. **Eponym**: (Gr. *epōnumos* named after) – Commemorates a real, mythical or fictional person. These mostly honour the name of the collector or the discoverer of species, but at other times may just honour another person.

**Grey-breasted Prinia**

The example of this bird is Grey-breasted Prinia, whose scientific name is *Prinia hodgsonii.* Here:

- ***Prinia***: a Javanese name 'Prinya';
- ***hodgsonii***: a name given in honour of Brian Houghton Hodgson (1800-1894), an English diplomat, resident of Nepal from 1833 to 1844, who was an ethnologist and a collector. His name figures in a number of species scientific names as *hodgsoni / hodgsoniae / hodgsonii / Hodgsonius* etc.

3. **Autochthonym**: (Gr. *autokhthōn* indigenous or native; *onuma* name) – Based on the indigenous or native name. They are more often used generically rather than specifically.

**Chukar**

An example of this bird is the beautiful Chukar whose scientific name is *Alectoris chukar*, where:

- ***Alectoris****:* a derivation of Greek word *alektoris***,** meaning 'farmyard fowl/chicken';
- ***chukar***: a derivative of Hindi name *Chukor*.

4. **Toponym**: (Gr. *topos* place; *onuma* name) – These have proved more popular as specific names than generic names. There are over 1,100 specific toponyms or geographical epithets.

**Black-rumped Flameback**

As an example of this category I have picked out Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*), where:

- ***Dinopium***: derivative of Greek *deinos,* meaning 'might', and *ōpos,* meaning 'appearance';
- ***benghalense***: this Toponym part depicts the geographical state of Bengal – historically a large part of India and Bangladesh.

5. **Taxonym**: (Gr. *taxis* arrangement; *onuma* name) This is based upon suggestive relationship or resemblance.

**Golden Babbler**

A good example is the Golden Babbler (*Stachyridopsis chrysaea*). Here:

- ***Stachyridopsis****:* derivative from genus Stachyris that roughly translates *stakhus* as 'ear of wheat'; *rhis*, referring to 'nostrils', points to the shape of opercula or scales almost closing the nostrils; and *opsis*, meaning 'appearance';
- ***chrysaea***: meaning 'golden'.

6. **Bionym**: (Gr. *bios* life; *onuma* name) – The popularity of habitat names reflects this diversity.

**Black-tailed Godwit**

As an example of this category, I have picked out this bird, Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*).

- ***Limosa****:* Latin derivative of *limosus*, which means 'muddy'.

The birds are very mobile and occur in a large variety of habitats. This bird, true to its name, is found on the muddy shores of oceans or lakes.

7. **Ergonym**: (Gr. *ergon* work, occupation; *onuma* name) – This category refers to display, typical habits, temperament, mode of flight, parasitism or breeding behaviour.

**Streaked Weaver**

As explained above, the name is a derivation of the work or occupation. An example is the Streaked Weaver (*Ploceus manyar*):

- ***Ploceus***: a derivative of Greek word *plokeus,* meaning 'weaver, braider or plaiter', (*plekō* being 'to plait' or 'to entwine');
- ***manyar***: the Tamil name *Manja* for various weavers

8. **Phagonym**: (Gr. *phagein* to eat, *onuma* name) – The names in this category reveal the variety of food items or prey of birds, including spiders, bananas, carrion, crabs, lizards etc.

**Little Spiderhunter**

Take the example of the Little Spiderhunter (*Arachnothera longirostra*), where:

- ***Arachnothera****:* literal translation of Greek word *arakhnēs***,** meaning 'spider'; and *thēras***,** meaning 'hunter';
- ***longirostra***: derivation of Latin *longus***,** meaning 'long'; and *rostris***,** meaning 'billed'.

So, all in all, the scientific name means 'spider hunter with a long bill'.

9. **Phononym**: (Gr. *phōnē* voice or sound, *onuma* name) – This category uses the names based upon the sounds/songs of the birds. Surprisingly, this category has yielded relatively few names in spite of the fact that the birds are so often associated with the songs or calls, and have been admired throughout the ages for the same.

**Common Chiffchaff**

An example here is Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*):

- ***Phylloscopus****:* derived from two Greek words, *phullon* meaning 'leaf'; and *skopos*, meaning 'seeker';
- ***collybita***: it is the second word, *collybita*, that is based on Latin *collybista*, meaning 'money-changer'. In Normandy, Common Chiffchaff is called *'Compteur d'argent'* from its song that resembles the clinking of coins.

This article just about scratches the surface of this fascinating subject of scientific naming of birds, and a lot of interesting study can be done. As I mentioned earlier, the above is a result of my interest and self-study, and it is possible that there may be some inconsistencies or differing interpretations/opinions. That would make for quite an interesting discussion.

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## THE MIGHTY KOEL

Text and Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati

May 19, 2019 was just another normal bird watching trip for Gokul and I at Osman Sagar, with some regularly irregular species. After a few clicks and sightings, we decided to head back home and, exiting the west side farms road, hit the Chevella highway. That was when we observed two birds perched in a tree on the other side of the road– a Blue-faced Malkoha and an Asian Koel.

To our surprise, the Koel suddenly took off to attack the Malkoha, and they both went crashing down on the ground. We hurriedly parked the car and exited the vehicle to see what was going on – and we were stunned at seeing the Koel pin down the Malkoha on the ground for a few seconds!

As we approached to click an image – which was not possible earlier since there was no view of the birds as they went down – the Koel got distracted and the Malkoha had a great escape. We looked around for any nests but there were none to be seen, and as far as we could tell, it was not a fight for food. We feel this calls for a good discussion about the unusual behaviour of these birds.

**Asian Koel pinning down Blue-faced Malkoha**

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# A FIRST TIMER'S MUSINGS
## Trip Report – Nehru Zoological Park, April 28, 2019

Jayasurya Pathapati

**Yellow Bittern**
(Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

Bird watching was never on my 'lifetime bucket list', at least until the past 4 months. In fact, I'd never heard of such a thing until I met a friend a while ago, who had a lot to say about it.

It all started with a budding interest in wildlife conservation activities, thanks to a few articles published in The Hindu, and I wanted to gain deeper knowledge into the best practices. As I was searching online, I came across a Home Study Course in Ornithology, offered by Rishi Valley Institute of Bird Sciences, which promised to shed light on Wildlife Conservation apart from its main focus, i.e., Bird Studies.

One of the quotes from the textbook says, "World without birds is unimaginable. If birds die, we all die". This shows how important a role they play in the collective ecosystem. As I read more and more about birds, I really wanted to get into birdwatching. I naturally Googled to check if there are any activities in Hyderabad, and that's how I came across the Deccan Birders. Honestly, I was quite surprised to see that the club has been established way back in 1980! I didn't waste a moment to register as a member.

**Oriental Magpie Robin**
(Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

This second Zoo trip of mine, which was very similar to the first (as a six-year-old kid!), was filled with so much awe and information, but unlike the first trip, here the species were in the wild, uncaged. I will always cherish my first sightings of the Oriental Magpie Robin, Black Drongo, Golden Oriole, and so many other birds which I had only read about in books.

**Indian Peafowl**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

I was also glad to meet experienced birders, photographers, and kids of whom I was jealous! I wish all the kids learnt how to love and protect mother nature, and also that we made environmental studies a major part of their education. I realized birdwatching is one such activity where people gather together, amidst lush greenery, to spot beautiful species, and get to know each other along the way. It's a wonderful outdoor activity at the least.

**Painted Stork**
(Photo: Satish Grama)

**Purple Swamphen**
**Adult (L) Chick (R)**
(Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya) (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

**Bronze-winged Jacana**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

**Grey Heron**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

The lake was where I spotted the most variety of species – Moorhens, Jacana (the Jesus Bird), Kingfishers, Painted Storks, Herons, Cormorants etc. This is where I saw the Darter for the first time, and also got to know, thanks to Shafaat sir, why is it called the Snakebird. I was amazed at how it swims with its thin long head stuck out of the water, looking almost like a Black Mamba!

**Rose-ringed Parakeet** (Photo: Satish Grama)

**Black Kite** (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

I observed even the most common birds such as Parakeets, Kites, Pigeons etc, paying particular attention to their physical structure, and how it is interconnected with their feeding, nesting, and mating habits, which are all crucial for their survival. “Every bird has its own niche”, I read in my course, which tells us how diversity is important for survival of the ecosystem.

**Indian Grey Hornbill**
(Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

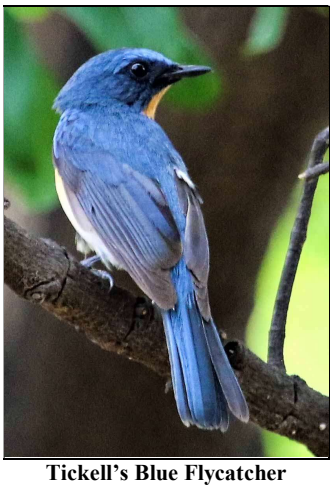
One thing that stood out about the Zoo is its well-maintained ecosystem and the variety of flora, be it the wooded region or surroundings of the lake, all of which, in turn, must have contributed to such diverse avifauna that is hard to find in other parts of the city.

This places emphasis on the saying “Take care of the habitat, and birds will take care of themselves”.

Some other photos taken during the trip:

**Spotted Owlet**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

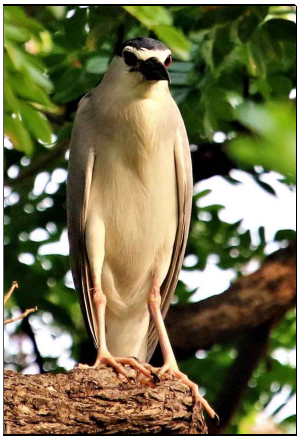
**Common Hawk Cuckoo**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)



**Tickell's Blue Flycatcher**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

**Melanistic Yellow-billed Babbler**
(Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

**Coppersmith Barbet** (Photo: Satish Grama)



**Black-crowned Night Heron adult**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

**Black-crowned Night Heron juvenile**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

**White-breasted Waterhen**
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

**Large Grey Babbler**
(Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya)

**Common Moorhen juvenile** (Photo: Satish Grama)

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## Report – Sighting of a Leucistic Common Coot at Himayatsagar Lake, June 16, 2019

Text and Photos: Gokul Krishna Addanki

**Leucistic Common Coot (L) with a normal individual (R)**

This was the first time I was taking my younger son Abhinav, 5 years old, on a birding trip. I was hoping to inculcate in him a love for nature, but I was a little unsure as to how he would take it. To my surprise, as soon as he got out of the car, he ran towards the lake and started shouting, "Daddy, look at the birds there"!

The smile on his face said everything, and I just enjoyed looking at him run around excitedly like that. We then sat down near the lake shore and started checking out the birds. He started asking me the names of all the birds he saw and wanted to watch them closely using the binoculars. Later he started telling me features of birds and then matching the names to the features of the birds.

While observing the birds, one of the group members saw something that looked different in the crowd of birds there. We initially thought it was one of the Knob-billed Ducks swimming along, but a closer look revealed that it was a leucistic Common Coot. This one was the lone white individual among a bunch of regular black-coloured Coots there. We clicked a couple of photos to make sure it ***was*** a Coot and then just started observing the behaviour.

Leucism is caused by a genetic mutation that prevents pigments being deposited correctly on the birds' feathers. It can be of various types, like bold white patches, paler coloration than the original, or completely white-looking birds with no coloration. Incidentally I also happened to have observed a leucistic Baya Weaver in the same area some time ago.

Looks like my son's presence brought me another reward, besides the joy of watching him enjoy himself so much!

**Leucistic Common Coot**

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## Who Am I?

### (Part-1)

Srikanth Bhamidipati

1. According to Roman Mythology, my brother and I were turned into wild animals as a punishment for eating other humans. I became a Strige and used to cry desperately during the night, being condemned to life upside down without food or drink. Who am I?

2. In Arab Mythology, I am regarded as an enlightened bird having powers to heal and the ability to divine water. I, along with my friends, once rescued a king who was stranded in the desert, by providing shade with our wings. Who am I?

3. I was a character in Shakespeare's tales and was used as a weather vane during medieval Europe. Who am I?

4. I am believed in German folklore to find babies in caves or marshes and bring them to households in a basket. Who am I?

5. Often depicted as a trickster or culture hero figure in Indian Mythology, I am highly intelligent. I am considered as the spirit of the forefathers. Who am I?

Please send your answers **by email** to umeshmani1@gmail.com on or before August 5, 2019. Members who give all correct answers will be acknowledged in the next issue of the Pitta.

* * *

## Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

PEANUTS
By Charles M. Schulz
HERE'S THE FIERCE VULTURE SITTING ON A TREE LIMB WAITING FOR A VICTIM..
VULTURES NEVER SIT ON TREE LIMBS DURING A SNOW-STORM
I WONDERED ABOUT THAT

(From The Times of India, January 25, 2018)

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## Bird of the Month

Text: Umesh Mani; Photo: Gurukumar KR

# Lesser Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*)

**Lesser Whistling Duck** (Safilguda, March 16, 2019)

Order: Anseriformes
Family: Anatidae
Genus: *Dendrocygna*
Species: *D. javanica*
Size: 42 cm

Description & distribution: The Lesser Whistling Duck, also known as Lesser Whistling Teal or Indian Whistling Duck, is a member of the sub-family Dendrocygninae of Tree Ducks or Whistling Ducks, under the family Anatidae, and are not regarded as true ducks. The genus Dendrocygna consists of eight species of Whistling Ducks; additionally, another species, the White-backed Duck (*Thalassornis leuconotus*) is considered by some authorities (e.g. Paul Johnsgard) to be also part of the same sub-family. All the Whistling Ducks have long legs and necks, a hunched appearance, and dark underwings. Of these, two species – Lesser and Fulvous Whistling Duck – are seen in India.

The Lesser Whistling Duck is resident across most of India (including the Andaman & Nicobar Islands), Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, east to south-east China and south through south-east Asia to Sumatra, Borneo, Java and Bali, although it may show some local movements depending on droughts and floods.

The Lesser Whistling Duck is a small, pale-brown and chestnut duck, and the only other duck of similar size that it can be confused with is the Fulvous Whistling Duck. The Lesser Whistling Duck has a greyish-buff head and neck, dark brown crown and nape, indistinct yellow eye-ring, warm chestnut underparts, darker brown upperparts with buff fringes to feathers, a bright chestnut patch on forewings, chestnut rump, dark grey legs and bill, and uniformly chestnut uppertail coverts. It can be differentiated from the Fulvous Whistling Duck by the chestnut forewing patch (absent in Fulvous), chestnut rump (white in Fulvous) and lack of a dark brown line down the hind neck (present in Fulvous). The sexes are alike; juvenile birds are duller in colour.

Habitat & behaviour: The Lesser Whistling Duck is gregarious and is usually seen in small to large flocks in vegetation- or weed-covered tanks, ponds, flooded grasslands and paddy fields, oxbow lakes and freshwater marshes. It prefers water bodies with emergent vegetation or partly submerged trees. It is a nocturnal feeder, and spends the day resting, usually on the water, though it does quite often perch on trees. Its diet consists mainly of aquatic vegetation, grasses, tender shoots and stalks, and grain from cultivated rice, although it also eats small fish, frogs, and invertebrates such as molluscs and worms. It may dabble or dive while feeding, but also walks well on marshland, often foraging like geese. It flies with rapid wingbeats on broad, dark, rounded wings and utters a characteristically incessant shrill, wheezy *seasick-seasick* or *tsee-tsee* call in flight or during take-off, a clear whistled *whi-whee* at rest, and also, sometimes, a subdued quacking.

Nesting: The Lesser Whistling Duck breeds coinciding with the start of the monsoon, i.e. between June and October, across most of its range; in Sri Lanka, it has been seen to breed also between December and January. The nest is usually a shallow natural hollow in a tree, lined with grass and twigs, though it often builds nests on the ground among reeds. Incubation is done by both parents. The usual clutch consists of 7-12 ivory-white eggs.

Local name: The Lesser Whistling Duck is known as *'Seelhi'* or *'Seelkahi'* in Hindi, '*Eelavese china chiluva'* in Telugu, *'Chilli thara'* or *'Mahudi thara'* in Tamil and '*Yeranda*' in Malayalam.

* * *

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